

WLCI Update

The mission of the WLCI is to conduct a long-term science-based program to assess and enhance the quality and quantity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats at a landscape scale in southwest Wyoming, based on community partnerships and facilitation of responsible development.

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Daily management and operation of the WLCI is based out of the BLM Rock Springs Field Office. If you are interested in working with the WLCI or have comments, please use the information listed below.

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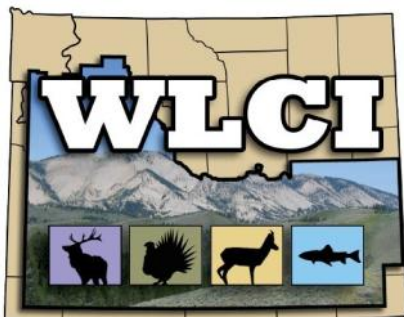
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**Wyoming Landscape
Conservation Initiative**

Sommers-Grindstone Project

One of the most extensive private land conservation efforts in Wyoming history, the Sommers-Grindstone Conservation Project, was finalized June 24. The easement located in Sublette County conserves nearly 19,000 acres of historic agricultural land, critical wildlife habitat and iconic view sheds. The landmark agreements of the Sommers-Grindstone project were made possible by the vision of landowners Albert Sommers, his sister Jonita Sommers and Maggie Miller of Grindstone Cattle Co. The project is a partnership between the landowners, the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission and the Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust.

Along with many other groups, the Wyoming Landscape Conservation Initiative (WLCI) supported the project and acquisition of a conservation easement. The WLCI's Sublette Local Project Development Team, which includes members from various organizations, considered the project its top priority for 2010 projects. Additionally, the project received the top ranking for all 2010 WLCI projects, with 180 out of 200 points.

The project areas lie at two critical locations along the Green River in northern Sublette County and serve as important wildlife corri-

dors and buffers from development between the Bridger Teton National Forest and the Green River. Two of the protected areas provide an immense, unbroken landscape between two large tracts of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. They are also located along the west side of the Pinedale Anticline natural gas field.

The cattle ranches are comprised of hay meadows, riparian areas, a diverse population of tree stands, upland areas, sagebrush and high-prairie-grass areas and wetlands. The agricultural land provides important habitat and vital migration corridors for deer, antelope, elk and moose. The riparian areas are home to nesting song birds, raptors, waterfowl, shorebirds, sandhill cranes and blue herons. Additionally, the ranches and surrounding areas host abundant breeding, nesting and other important sage-grouse habitat.

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The Sommers property on the Green River.

Sommers-Grindstone Project ... continued

An extensive group of funders joined together to fund the easement, including the Pinedale Anticline and Jonah Field mitigation funds (JIO & PAPO), Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust, Wyoming Game and Fish Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Landowner Incentive Grant Program, Wal-Mart Acres for America through the National Fish and Wildlife

Foundation, WLCI through the BLM, Doris Duke Charitable Trust through the Nature Conservancy, Turner Foundation, Wyoming Governor's Big Game License Coalition, Wildlife Heritage Foundation of Wyoming, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Mule Deer Foundation, as well as a significant contribution from the landowners.



A view of the Grindstone portion of the easement.

Executive Committee Notes

The WLCI Executive Committee (EC) visited the far southwest corner of Wyoming for its quarterly meeting on July 8-9, 2010. Stops included the YC Ranch and a wind farm near Evanston, weed treatments near Lyman, and areas where sagebrush was treated approximately 15 years ago. The EC meeting was held July 9 at the Lyman Town Hall.

The YC Ranch project involved water improvements and was funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. WLCI funding provided through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) helped provide the control of tamarisk and other invasive species in cooperation with Uinta County Weed and Pest Control. The tour stops at the wind farm and sagebrush treatments provided a better understanding of the area.



Presentation at a wind farm near Evanston.

The EC rotates meeting locations to facilitate tours of the different WLCI activities and to interact with people across the WLCI area. Other recent meetings were held at Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge (April 2010), Rock Springs (January 2010), Pinedale (October 2009), and Baggs (July 2009).

Another item of note is the EC has had leadership changes twice in the past few months. In April FWS Wyoming Field Supervisor Brian Kelly assumed the chair position from Sublette County Commissioner John Linn. However, Kelly took a position as the FWS field supervisor for Idaho, which prevented him from completing his year as chair. At the July EC meeting, Wyoming Game and Fish Director Steve Ferrell moved from first vice chair to chair and Sweetwater County Conservation District Chair Mary Thoman moved from second vice chair to first vice chair. The EC elected BLM Wyoming State Director Don Simpson as second vice chair.

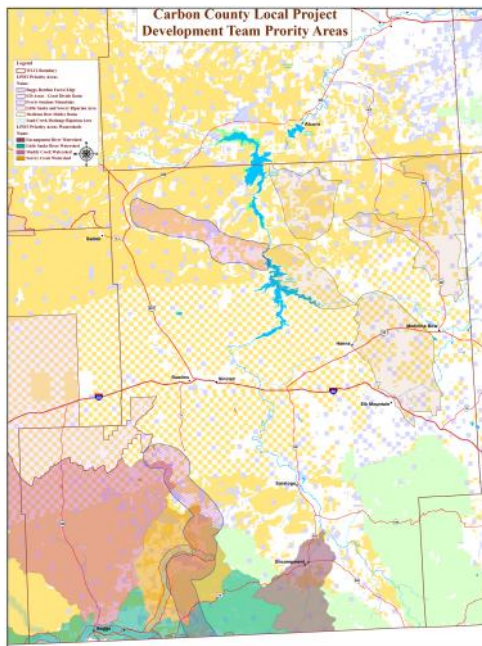


Sagebrush treatment area visited for the July Executive Committee tour.

Conservation Action Plan

Partners are creating a strategy for future conservation in southwest Wyoming by assembling a WLCI Conservation Action Plan (CAP). This plan has grown from initial WLCI efforts, which were largely “off the shelf” projects that did not fully consider contributions of each project to the landscape. The four Local Project Development Teams (LPDTs) are identifying priority areas for conservation. Local knowledge of individuals on the LPDTs and the results of scientific research are used to develop the most needed conservation actions within those areas.

By evaluating priorities, tables and maps of issues and needs have been constructed for each LPDT area of concern. This information highlights wildlife and habitat values, area-specific needs, and current and predicted energy development. The tables and maps will be refined through additional input by LPDT members using local



Preliminary map of Carbon County priority conservation areas.

input, local knowledge and expertise to transform ideas into strategic conservation objectives. The result of this conservation planning process will be a road map that will guide WLCI conser-

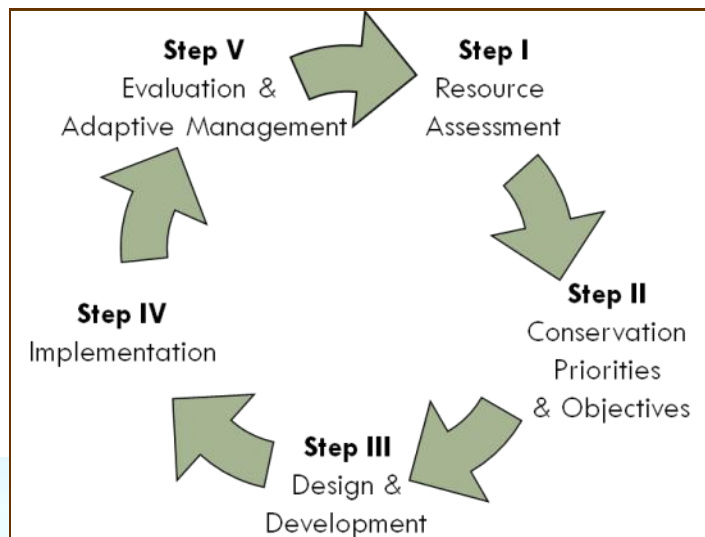
vation actions for five years.

The CAP will explain what will be achieved, where work will be focused, what approaches and tools will be used, and how work will be integrated with science and partner priorities. It will help transfer site-specific goals and objectives to landscape level accomplishments. The CAP will incorporate existing actions or programs and lay a foundation for new conservation work. The plan will also identify objectives for success that will help measure effectiveness of each project and overall contributions to the WLCI. The WLCI anticipates the CAP will enhance and improve funding opportunities for projects in the WLCI area.

The conservation plan will be reviewed in draft form by many of the WLCI teams and committees. Continued refinement of the plan is anticipated over time.



Evaluating maps at a Local Project Development Team meeting in Green River.



Representation of the conservation planning process.

Spreading the WLCI Message

by Justin Caudill

In July 2010, I had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the WLCI in our nation's capital. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) hosted a briefing to the Congressional Subcommittee on Natural Resources titled, "Thinking Regionally, Acting Locally: Natural Resource Challenges on a Large Scale." USGS invited the WLCI to present our program as it represents the topic well.

As the Wyoming Department of Agriculture's (WDA) Program Coordinator to the WLCI, I was very proud and honored to represent the WDA and WLCI in Washington, D.C. The briefing highlighted the work of three programs. The other presenters were: K. Bruce Jones, a USGS scientist with more than 30 years of experience, and Ron Rempel, a retired California Game and Fish Deputy Director and presently San Diego's Management & Monitoring Program Lead. We each presented the work our respective programs are attempting to accomplish on landscape scales. The presentations were followed by a question and answer session.

This event was an opportunity for me to brag about the WLCI and how we function in southwest Wyoming, providing examples of our priorities, projects and partnerships. I explained how priorities are developed by involving all of our partners while focusing on observed habitat issues or needs and identifying science gaps. I pointed out that initially our projects were taken off the shelf, but now we have a project development process that directs actions to address our priorities and relies on local involvement from four geographically-based local project development teams. I also provided information about partnerships since the WLCI area covers more than 19 million acres and consists of an intricate mix of public and private lands. Development of partnerships has been essential to WLCI being successful in working on a common vision for landscape conservation in southwest Wyoming. Additionally, I described the



Justin Caudill during his presentation.

WLCI's concept of a Conservation Action Plan (CAP), which will be a five year roadmap directing where and how the WLCI implements conservation actions.

Although I was very honored to represent the WDA and WLCI on this trip, I was intimidated as I worked with USGS staff and others to polish my presentation. The USGS folks were great at finding ways to improve the message I wanted to share and I owe them my thanks for the success I had in spreading the WLCI message.



Stimulus Funds at Work

Irrigation of recently planted cottonwood trees at Seedskadee National Wildlife Refuge. The trees were planted using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). WLCI received ARRA funding through the Bureau of Land Management for various riparian projects: using a seasonal crew to fence riparian areas, planting trees to stabilize the banks of Muddy Creek, repairing the dike for the BQ Canal, supporting the Killdeer Wetlands project along the Green River, replacing culverts for Colorado River cutthroat trout in the LaBarge Creek Watershed, and reducing erosion control for various Colorado River tributaries.